

Eradicating women's poverty

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the world to its knees and impacted almost all aspects of human life. The pandemic is estimated to have pushed between 143 and 163 million people into poverty [in 2021](#). Moreover, the world is also facing negative global economic developments.

These circumstances are highlighting the importance of commemorating the **International Day for the Eradication of Poverty** that is held annually on the 17th October to raise awareness and recognize the essential shared responsibility we all have to eradicate poverty and combat all forms of discrimination.

The chosen theme for this year by the United Nations is '[Dignity for all in practice](#)', in view that the dignity of human beings is the basis of all other fundamental rights. Many individuals living in poverty *"experience their dignity being denied and disrespected"*. Each year, the gap between the poor and the rich gets even wider in view that *"inequalities of opportunities and income are sharply on the rise."*

People living in poverty experience many hardships that prevent them from realizing their rights and living their lives fully, including: lack of nutritious food, unsafe housing, dangerous work conditions, and unequal access to justice, amongst others.

While poverty affects both women and men, women are more likely to live in poverty than men. According to the latest data published by the [Eurostat](#), in 2021, 21.9% of women and 18.9% of men in Malta remain at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

The [poverty of women](#) emanates from a range of interrelated factors, such as women's precarious position in the labour market due to a strong educational and occupational gender segregation stemming from traditional stereotypes, the unequal sharing of care and domestic household responsibilities between women and men leading to lower payment of work done mainly by women, the gender pay and pension gaps, the lack of sufficient and affordable educational and care services, social exclusion, and discrimination and violence against women.

The situation is even worse for women belonging to [vulnerable groups](#), who are more likely to live in poverty, including: Muslim women, migrant women, trans women, older women, women with disabilities, single mothers, and women with a low socio-economic status etc.

Eradicating poverty for both women and men requires determination and commitment. It needs all of us to work together at the national, European, and international levels. In this context, the European Network of Equality Bodies' (EQUINET) [discussion paper](#) on 'women in poverty' put forward a set of recommendations to EU and national policy-makers.

Such recommendations include: a proposal for an EU directive on minimum income schemes that would lay the foundation for a basic social safety net to fight poverty and inequalities, an advance towards an EU legal instrument to ensure an adequate level of minimum wages that could lead to a *“transformative change for women workers, as they are a majority amongst the lowest paid workers”*, a call for the revision of and a more ambitious gender pay gap action plan, and an investment in providing more assistance programmes for family care, amongst others.

Moreover, gender budgeting is also crucial in this regard. According to the [Council of Europe](#), gender budgeting is a *“gender-based assessment of budgets incorporating a gender perspective at all levels of the budgetary process and restructuring revenues and expenditures in order to promote gender equality”*. Hence, gender budgeting is the allocation of public resources that address the specific needs of women and men.

Various measures are taken by the Maltese Government to mitigate the risk of falling into poverty. Recently, the Government announced that around 80,000 people from 37,000 households will be getting an additional Cost-of-Living Allowance (COLA) to those who are most vulnerable and those who needed it most.

In order to curb the risk of women from falling into poverty and social exclusion, more work must be done to combat inequalities and discrimination. In Malta, the [National Commission for the Promotion of Equality \(NCPE\)](#) works to ensure that Maltese society is a society free from discrimination. Anyone who believes that s/he has been a victim of discrimination based in employment, banks, and financial institutions, as well as education, may lodge a complaint

to the NCPE. In addition, the NCPE also promotes equality through awareness-raising campaigns, policy work, research, and training sessions related to equality and non-discrimination.

As stated by [Joseph Wresinski](#), founder of All Together in Dignity (ATD) Fourth World, an international non-governmental organisation working among and in collaboration with the most excluded families worldwide, *“wherever men and women are condemned to live in extreme poverty, human rights are violated. To come together to ensure that these rights be respected is our solemn duty.”*

The [National Commission for the Promotion of Equality \(NCPE\)](#) can be contacted on: 2276 8200 or equality@gov.mt or our Facebook page.

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